

Obituaries

Lama Zopa Rinpoche requests that "students who read *Mandala* pray that the students whose obituaries follow find a perfect human body, meet a Mahayana guru and become enlightened quickly, or be born in a pure land where the teachings exist and they can become enlightened." Reading these obituaries also helps us reflect upon our own death and rebirth – and so use our lives in the most meaningful way.

Advice and Practices for Death and Dying is available from the Foundation Store www.fpmt.org/shop

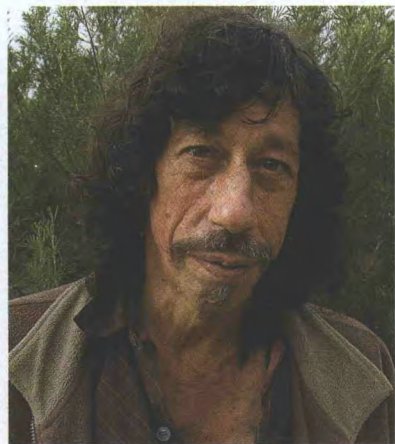
Brenton Pratt a.k.a. Brenton Stringy Bark, artist, 54, died October 11, 2007 in South Australia, of cancer.

By Lindsay Pratt

My brother had been experiencing discomfort for a few months prior to being diagnosed with cancer. He underwent surgery and initial results were positive, however a scan six months after the initial diagnosis showed further cancer. At this stage Brenton told me that death was a high probability.

Brenton had attended the first Australian Lam Rim course with Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa in 1975 in Queensland. He returned two years later with his partner Josie and settled near Chenrezig Institute where their daughters Arwen and Katie were born. Brenton established a vegetable garden at Chenrezig Institute and did odd jobs in the district to support his family. Later, Brenton and his family went back to South Australia and settled in the Adelaide Hills.

Brenton was a gardener and an artist. He didn't drive a car and was often seen walking from one gardening job to the next. He held grave concerns for the plight of the environment and for social injustice and these themes were constantly reflected in his art. He was one of those few people who seemed impervious to society's expectations and to the seduction of materialism. He was politically astute and only too ready to enter into debate on political and social issues. Although he was critical of politicians and business greed, he conversed quite readily with people from all walks of life.



After the results of the second scan, and with the knowledge that death was likely, Brenton asked me to send him some books on the death process that might help him to prepare for death. His health declined quite quickly, but he remained determined to be as independent



"Dissolution" by Brenton Stringy Bark

as possible and managed this with the help of his friends and especially his daughters Arwen and Katie.

Although the last few days of Brenton's life were sad, they were also very uplifting. Throughout his illness he had the support of his family and his many friends, and during the last few days of his life he was visited and supported by so many of them, some of whom showed up unexpectedly from interstate. Brenton enjoyed these visits and asked to be wheeled out into the gardens of the hospital where he could talk to his visitors. The atmosphere at these get-togethers was relaxed. It seemed a wonderful opportunity for family and friends to say goodbye to him. Alice, Brenton's mother, enjoyed these last few days where she was able to be by her

son's side surrounded by family and friends in a peaceful and supportive atmosphere.

It was at the end of one of these days that Brenton arranged the details of his funeral ceremony and requested his daughter Arwen to organize a Buddhist ceremony because he took solace in the Mahayana Buddhist path of the Bodhisattva ideal. The next day Brenton slipped into a coma, and died with his family and friends around him. Natalie Kagan from Buddha House presided over a lovely funeral ceremony and his request that his ashes be spread over the summit of Mt. George, a special place in the bush where he frequently walked, was fulfilled a few days later by Josie, Arwen, Katie and a few friends.

Geshe Tashi Tsering, who was in Tibet at the time, organized prayers, a puja dedication was conducted at Chenrezig Institute, and Brenton was included in the prayers of His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Lama Zopa Rinpoche.

A week later, an exhibition of his paintings was held in a gallery in Adelaide and everyone was invited to the opening to celebrate his art and his life.

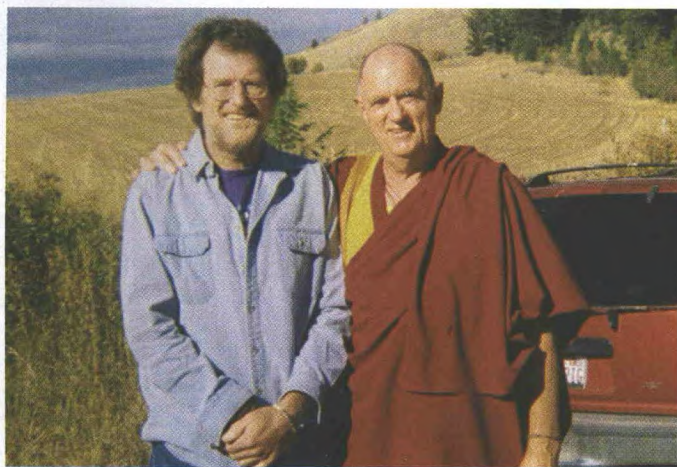
In the weeks after his death I revisited Brenton's favorite bushwalk and the many influences that inspired his artwork and his love of nature.

Rainwolf-Brad-Horn, 47, died February 10, 2008 in Tonasket, Washington State, USA, of cancer.

By Willow Wolf-Horn

My husband Rainwolf's story is certainly an inspiring and courageous one. About six months after I came to the Dharma [in the Fall of 2006], Rainwolf developed an interest in Buddhism himself. At that time, he was dealing with esophageal cancer for the second time in seven years.

Rainwolf was an organic garlic farmer in the Okanagon



Rainwolf with Ven. Yarphel

Highlands of Washington State. It was a low-key operation that he took great satisfaction in. The most important feature of his business was that his garlic was the healthiest and most beautiful product possible, always enhanced by his special TLC.

We lived in a rural setting, where I continue to live. We had to drive hundreds of miles, and be away from home for months at a time, while he was undergoing desperate treatments. One night, while we were alone in the home-away-from-home that his kind brother and sister-in-law had provided for us, he asked me what I was reading. I knew very little of the Dharma at that time, and most of that was from books by His Holiness the Dalai Lama and others I was slightly familiar with. Until then he'd not shown much interest in what I was reading or doing. That night, he set down his *Time* magazine, met the Dharma for the first time, and virtually never looked back.

For months he had been angry, agitated and very ill from the treatments and his likely impending death. One such treatment would soon damage his cervical spine, causing almost unmanageable pain in his neck, preventing him from sleeping in any position other than on his back. But from the time that Rainwolf met the Dharma, all the while he was in treatment, until he died at home under Hospice care months later, he was steadfast and determined to be as ready as possible for his chosen path and approaching death.

We returned to our country home and small farming community in June of 2007. Soon afterwards, we discovered that our small country town had a Dharma group [Pamtingpa Study Group], and less than an hour away was Lama Zopa Rinpoche's retreat house. One of the monks who was caretaking the retreat house, and also teaching in town, was Ven. Yarphel [John Jackson]. We attended classes in Tonasket, taught by Ven. Yarphel, until Rainwolf was too ill to attend and came under the homecare of Hospice. From then until Rainwolf's death, Ven. Yarphel and several from our Dharma group came to us every week, almost an hour's drive from Tonasket, to do Medicine Buddha Puja. In addition, Rainwolf and I did nightly purification practices together. The group and I continued to do weekly puja until the forty-nine days passed. And precious Yangsi Rinpoche did *pho-wa* and other rituals on Rainwolf's behalf. I am so grateful to all who have kindly and faithfully supported us in both practical and spiritual ways these many months; namely Ven. Yarphel, Hospice nurses, and our beloved Dharma group.

Ven. Yarphel whisked us off to Portland one weekend for an audience with Yangsi Rinpoche. Rainwolf was very sick at the time, so Ven. Yarphel made him a makeshift bed in the

back and off we went, an eight-hour drive from Tonasket. Meeting Yangsi Rinpoche and having him agree to be our guru was a highlight of our lives in the last few months Rainwolf was alive. During that meeting, Yangsi Rinpoche suggested Rainwolf do Nyung Na. Ven. Yarphel wondered if he would be able to do such a rigorous practice, being so ill. But that didn't deter either one of them. Rainwolf and Ven. Yarphel spent the first weekend after returning from Portland doing the Nyung Na, including every single prostration. Rainwolf was so motivated and strong in his resolve. He constantly inspired and blessed those who cared for him, and others he came in contact with.

Even when Rainwolf could no longer get out of bed to do the pujas, he would say them along with us from the other room. We had placed his hospital bed in our shrine room where there is a beautiful view of the land. Whenever I would look in on him, he would be doing Chenrezig practice, doing tonglen or saying mantras. It was very inspiring to see. Many times when he was so miserable, in pain or sick, and I was attending to him in the night, I would simply begin saying mantras out loud and he would immediately join in. The last week he was alive he told me, "All I want in my next life is to be a bodhisattva."

Rainwolf was forty-seven years old when he died. Through all the months he was under Hospice care, until his death, he never lost consciousness or awareness of what was going on around him, or his spirit of determination.

He is greatly missed, but I am encouraged often by the memory of his strength.

Beatrice Ribush, 95, died March 15 2008 in Melbourne Australia

By Nicholas Ribush

I was attending His Holiness the Dalai Lama's teachings in Bodhgaya in 1981 when news of his mother's death arrived. The Tibetans became very distressed, weeping and wailing all over the place, but at his next discourse, His Holiness looked at them bemused and said words to the effect of, "People, get a grip. What are you crying for? She was the mother of the Dalai Lama, had a long and privileged life, did millions and millions of *manis* and other practices, and has been reborn in a pure land. There's nothing to cry about."

So when my mother died March 15 this year and people suggested I must be taking it hard, as many did, I was reminded of His Holiness's words. Not that she was the mother of anybody holy, but she did have a long and happy

life, was devoted to the Dharma for her last thirty-five years, was ready to go, had a swift and relatively easy death, and from the moment it came had Lama Zopa Rinpoche doing *pho-wa* and other prayers for her. In addition, many other lamas have been doing prayers and pujas, and at a recent teaching in New Delhi, which I was able to attend a few days after Mum's funeral, His Holiness the Dalai Lama blessed her ashes. Also, her old and close friend, Ven. Konchog Dronma (Bonnie Rothenberg), who lives in Dharamsala, immediately organized many prayers and pujas at Gyüto and Gyümed Tantric Colleges and Kirti Gomba and many other merit-generating things as well. Finally, Lama Zopa Rinpoche had very kindly visited mother at her home in Melbourne in 2006 and felt that mentally, she was in a great place and had nothing to worry about.

I always (well, almost always) felt she was a perfect mother. Giving my brother Dorian and me top priority in her life, she always did what had to be done for our benefit and unconditionally supported our life choices, no matter how weird or unconventional they might have been, and often were. She frequently told me, "I just want you to be happy."

My parents were Russian and came to Australia from Latvia in the mid-thirties. My father went into business and gave us all a comfortable middle-class life. My brother and I went to a top private school and, as was the norm, my mother didn't have to work but was what used to be called a housewife. Not that she stayed in the house that much – her upper class life in Riga dictated that even in Melbourne she had hired help to do the cleaning, washing and so forth. She did, however, learn to cook.

My father died when I was in my last year of secondary school, and despite a total lack of experience, my mother took over his business in order to put both Dorian and me through medical school. After a few years of that she sold the business, bought a block of flats, and then learned to type so that she could team up with a blind friend translating scientific documents from Russian into English for the CSIRO. She did what had to be done. When after several years on the straight and narrow I started to venture beyond the conventional confines of medicine, she even watered the dope my friends and I grew in her backyard.

She loved to travel, so understood when, in 1972, I decided to take a four-year break from medicine to see the world. Accordingly, my girlfriend Marie (Yeshe Khadro) and I set off for the East and wandered around Indonesia,



PHOTO: Ven. Roger Kunsang

Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Burma and India for about six months, eventually ending up in Nepal at the third Kopan meditation course. Up until that time I'd been sending her the perfunctory postcard: "Having a great time," "The beaches are amazing," "Wish you were here." After the course I started sending her twenty-page evangelical raves about beginningless mind, the perfect human rebirth, impermanence and the imminence of death. She must have thought I'd gone troppo. Often I would finish my letters by saying that anyway, I couldn't really explain what was going on at Kopan and if she wanted to know she'd have to come to find out for herself. So, at the age of sixty, she did. (Behind this may also have been the motivation to rescue me from the cult that had obviously brainwashed me.)

At the fourth course, March 1973, she met Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa Rinpoche and immediately made a strong connection with them. That was the last course held in the old gompa, and with 120 participants in that small space it was often quite humid. One day she fainted. We passed her out the side window and took her to where she was staying in Sister Max's little brick house down from the gompa and laid her on the bed. I was like, "OK, take two aspirin and call me in the morning," but then Lama appeared, sat beside her on the bed, and rubbed her back and recited mantras for a couple of hours. It really struck me how much more he cared about her than I, the son, did. A sobering moment.

By the end of the course she still wasn't convinced, but when she got back to Melbourne and thought about things she decided that Buddhism was definitely her path. As up to that point she'd been a card-carrying atheist and rabid scientific materialist, her ability to change a lifetime's thinking

was again testimony to her flexibility and openness of mind. When the Lamas came to Melbourne in 1974 and the next few years, they always stayed at her house. She was instrumental in the early development of Tara House (now Tara Institute) but eventually found a comfortable niche at the Buddhist Society of Victoria, where (again without any experience) she served as treasurer for fourteen years. Also, unlike most of us, as soon as she took refuge she immediately realized the cruelty, contradictions and hypocrisy inherent in a Buddhist's eating meat and became a lifelong vegetarian. It took me more than thirty years to reach that point.

As ever, during this time, she supported me in every way. When I decided to drop out of medicine, stay in Nepal and become a monk, she accepted my choice and offered the \$50 a month we all needed to live at Kopan in those days. Years later, when I was in London running Wisdom Publications and we needed money, she lent us tens of thousands of dollars. When in the mid-80s I decided to disrobe, she supported that decision as well. Actually, I had forgotten how much she helped me in my various Dharma jobs and how much I demanded of her until we were clearing out her house and I found a huge collection of letters I'd written to her over the years, most containing requests for her to do this or that, all of which she unstintingly did. I really felt embarrassed reading all these unreasonable demands. But she always did what had to be done.

Mother remained in amazingly good health, living alone at home and continuing to drive her increasingly battered car until she was ninety. Then, in 2004, after a minor tooth infection, she got dehydrated, passed out and lost enough brain function that she could no longer live unassisted. Up

until then she had been wonderfully supported by Dorian and his ex-wife, Alison, a former director of Tara Institute and Mandala Books. Now they really stepped up to the plate to make sure Mum could remain at home with her beloved cat Kotik and not have to be institutionalized. They really took care of her and I am so grateful to them both, as their being there all these years has enabled me to be elsewhere, working for the FPMT in the various capacities I have. Also, Dorian, supported by his wife Cheryl, paid for Mum to have twenty-four-hour live-in home care so that she could remain in familiar surroundings until the end, an incredibly generous repayment of the kindness she had always shown us and something many others would not have chosen to do. I really thank him for that.

A couple of years ago Mum fell and broke her hip and it took her about eighteen months to fully recover. Then, on March 13, she broke the other one. After surgery the next day she seemed to be doing well but that night began to go downhill and passed away on the morning of the 15th.

Mother's funeral on March 20 was more a celebration of her life. The service was beautifully conducted by Allys

Andrews and the prayers and meditations led by Ven. Carolyn Lawler, both of Tara Institute. Most of Mother's friends are, of course, dead but many of their children, my childhood friends, were there. Some of my friends from medical school also attended, as did many of her friends and colleagues from the FPMT and the BSV. Several of these people spoke about her life and it was a very warm occasion.

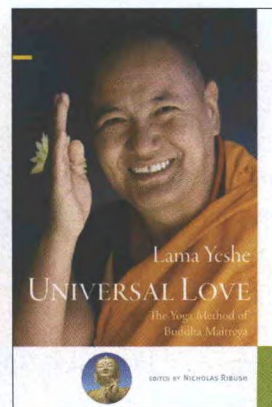
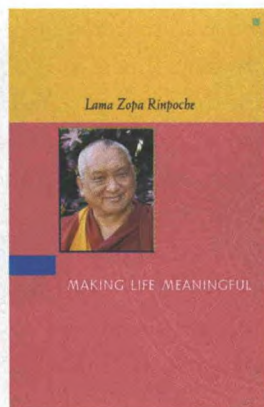
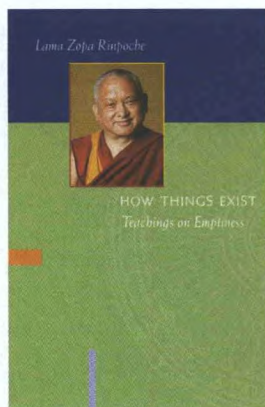
Some years ago Mum decided she would like her ashes to go into the Great Stupa of Universal Compassion being built in Bendigo, so that will be done. Also, Lama Zopa Rinpoche recommended making a set of large Twenty-one Taras statues in her memory and, since this is rather a lot for an individual to do, we are hoping to contribute to a set being made at Tushita Retreat Centre, Dharamsala. We are also hoping to make stupas for her at Root Institute, Chenrezig Institute and Land of Medicine Buddha and, to cover more bases, sprinkle some ashes in the Ganges!

May she once again come under the care of kind, compassionate lamas and quickly reach enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings. ☸

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